



ALBERTA

# *Speech* *from the* *Throne*

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Delivered by Her Honour  
The Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM

Lieutenant Governor  
Fourth Session of the  
Twenty-fourth Legislature

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Thursday, February 17, 2000

## Introduction

Fellow Albertans, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the Fourth Session of the Twenty-fourth Alberta Legislature. I am honoured to speak to you today as Alberta's Lieutenant Governor, a role I accept with pride and a full appreciation of its time-honoured place in our cherished democratic system.

As Alberta and Canada welcome the new century, let me begin with a quotation from the first throne speech of the previous century and the first-ever presented in Alberta. It was delivered by Lieutenant Governor George Hedley Vicars Bulyea on March 15, 1906.

*Our thanks are due to Divine Providence for the bountiful harvest with which we were blessed during the past year. Insomuch as the fruits of the soil are at the basis of the material prosperity of any country, the glorious heritage to which the people of this Province have been called justifies a boundless confidence in the future.*

With that eloquent endorsement of Alberta's potential, so began the province's journey as a partner in Confederation. Today, Albertans look back with tremendous pride for what they achieved through the twentieth century, and look forward with confidence to the challenges and opportunities of the new century.

## Introduction of Special Guests

We are honoured to have in this Assembly today an Albertan who was born in the year that first throne speech was delivered. Mrs. Mathilda Hirsch of Edmonton, seated with the Premier's guests, was born in Wetaskiwin and represents four generations of Albertans – men and women who weathered the storms of war and depression to bequeath to us and to our children a province well-poised for growth and prosperity in the coming century. We thank Mrs. Hirsch, and the many Albertans like her – some still with us, many not – who worked so hard throughout the twentieth century so that the new century could offer such promise.

Also present today are 13 students of the Class of 2000, along with their teacher, Mr. Jeff Larbalestier. These students, from the International Baccalaureate Program at Stratford Campus of Jasper Place High School, will be Alberta's first

graduates of the twenty-first century. They are beginning their journeys to adulthood in our province.

These students represent the generation that will continue the work of Mrs. Hirsch in the coming years. Among them lie the potential of today and the energies that will fuel tomorrow.

These young Albertans, along with their classmates and peers in high schools across the province, inspire great confidence and hope for Alberta's new century.

Finally, I wish to introduce Baby Micheal Tustin, along with his parents, Theresa and Dwayne Tustin. Baby Micheal was born at the Grey Nuns Hospital early on January 1, 2000 and is one of Alberta's millennium children.

With Baby Micheal and all those born in the opening months of the new century, lies the potential of tomorrow. Every child born in Alberta is blessed with a birthright of Canadian citizenship in this province – a birthright of economic opportunity, personal freedom, clear choices, and safe communities. They, in turn, will grow into adults who will work to ensure that birthright endures for their children.

As this Legislative Assembly begins its first deliberations of the new century, the government re-affirms its commitment to maintaining this birthright for Baby Micheal, for the Class of 2000, for Mrs. Hirsch, and for all other citizens in this province who, together, turn potential into reality.

### Albertans' Values and Principles of Government

This birthright is based on certain values that have distinguished Alberta within Confederation since the time of Lieutenant Governor Bulyea.

Albertans are *confident* – confident in their province, in their ability to succeed, and in the strength of their province.

Albertans are *entrepreneurial people*, who believe that citizens should have the freedom to pursue their goals. They also value *innovation*, and are not afraid to take risks or try new ideas if the goal of these actions is worthwhile.

*Self-reliance* is another key value for Albertans. Albertans accept personal responsibility for their lives while recognizing that many of their neighbours sometimes need assistance, which they are happy to give.

Albertans are also a *spiritual* people, who embrace their faith with a quiet passion while respecting the faiths of others.

Recognizing their province is blessed with unmatched natural beauty, Albertans also place a high value on *enjoying and protecting our natural environment*.

It is these values – the values that have shaped almost a century of Alberta history – that will guide the province through the twenty-first century.

It is also these values that shape the principles by which this government will govern over the next year and beyond.

These principles are:

- Fiscal responsibility, which has become the basis of Albertans' confidence in the economy;
- Innovation, which means making effective change that benefits the province;
- Equity, which includes fairness for all citizens and respect for diversity of culture, age, gender, and other characteristics; and
- Balance, especially balance between revenues and expenditures, saving and spending, and development and sustainability.

Today, this government re-commits itself to these principles and lays out a plan that is based on them. The plan, like Albertans themselves, is bold and forward-looking. It respects the values of Albertans while recognizing that a new century holds new challenges and therefore requires new ideas to meet those challenges.

### The Government Plan – Agriculture

When Lieutenant Governor Bulyea spoke of Alberta's bountiful harvest, he spoke primarily of the province's agricultural strength. Today, Alberta's harvest spreads beyond our expanse of farmlands. We reap the harvests of a vibrant energy



sector, of an energetic retail and service sector, of a public service delivering health and education and other services, of a growing high-tech sector, and of a bustling international trade sector.

But just as in 1906, the harvest of plenty begins on Alberta farms.

Agriculture will continue to be a cornerstone of our provincial economy. While making up nine percent of Canada's population, Alberta accounts for 20 percent of the nation's primary agricultural production. One in every three jobs in Alberta depends on agriculture, from the farmer in the field to the person working at the supermarket.

The government recognizes that these are challenging times for agriculture – that this industry that holds together countless Alberta communities is at a crossroads. Some family farms are in jeopardy, and the ties that bound neighbors together in Lieutenant Governor Bulyea's time risk being severed.

Our government will not stand idly by to let this happen. The family farm of a century ago is bound to undergo change, but the agricultural industry will remain vital to this province's prosperity.

As a result, the government has begun to develop a plan to ensure the long-term sustainability of this diverse industry. The recent agricultural leaders' workshop will lead to regional meetings throughout Alberta in March. The process will culminate in Ag Summit 2000, to be held on June 7 and 8.

The government will continue to provide a responsive safety-net package for farmers facing disaster. A review of Alberta's Hail and Crop Insurance Program will also be undertaken, resulting in a restructuring of risk management programs to better meet the needs of our producers.

We will also continue to work with the federal government to advance Alberta's interest in improved trade rules and market access for the industry. The focus is on expanding access for value-added products that use Alberta agricultural products as input. As Alberta has many farmers who depend on commodity exports, efforts to remove barriers and subsidies in the European Union and the United States will continue to be a priority.

## The Government Plan – Jobs and the Economy

In other areas of economic activity, we also commit to maintaining a plentiful harvest.

This spring, the government starts work on implementing an updated economic strategy for Alberta. The strategy will help create an environment in which Albertans can build on the province's economic strengths by forging strong links among economy, innovation, learning and quality of life.

The strategy lays out a comprehensive plan for the future that focuses on competing in the global economy and maximizing the human talent and ingenuity of all Albertans.

Alberta's Aboriginal peoples are key players in the province's economic future. Following consultation with First Nations and Metis leaders and organizations, industry, municipalities, and others, the government will release a new Aboriginal Policy Framework. The framework will guide government in its relations with Aboriginal peoples and create an environment in which Aboriginal peoples can better participate in the Alberta Advantage.

In the area of innovation and science, the government recognizes that Alberta can and must be a leader in the areas of information and communications technology and leading-edge research.

To that end, this year the government will work with its partners to connect communities across Alberta with high-speed, high-bandwidth Internet access. This will create enormous opportunities for all Albertans, regardless of where they live, to benefit from distance learning, electronic commerce, and better access to government services.

Legislation will be introduced to establish the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research. This \$500-million endowment fund will enhance research in the fields of science and engineering in Alberta and help the province maintain a leadership role in areas that will play crucial roles in the future of the province. It will encourage Alberta's brightest minds to stay here in Alberta, and to recognize that Alberta is the place to be. For the Alberta of the twenty-first century, it creates a legacy of excellence.

In addition, over \$90 million will be allocated to support research initiatives in the areas of agriculture, bioscience, health, forestry, energy and industry. From these funds, the nation-wide "brain drain" problem will be addressed by an allocation of approximately \$18 million to continue supporting faculty at Alberta universities and research hospitals, and a further \$10 million to support the Informatics Circle of Research Excellence, which will attract communications and technology researchers to Alberta.

Attracting researchers is important to Alberta's economic success. Equally important is developing a well-trained and highly educated work force right here so that Alberta's economy can respond effectively to changing market demand and industry needs. The government will continue to create a positive and stable labour climate that fosters one of the highest productivity rates and most-impressive workplace safety records in Canada.

This government will also continue to help build a strong and skilled labour force through expanded programs to help youth entering the work force get the training they need to find meaningful employment. Changes will be introduced to provide more flexibility in Alberta's apprenticeship and training system while maintaining the province's high industry standards.

Recognizing that a competitive tax regime is essential to economic growth, the government will continue to reform the provincial tax system. In this session, legislation will be introduced to put into law Alberta's tax reform plan, including a phasing-out of the remaining surtax, the elimination of the eroding effects of inflation on workers' salaries, a significant increase in personal exemptions, the removal of 132,000 Albertans from the provincial tax roll, and the move to a new 11-percent, single-rate provincial income tax – all by January 1, 2001.

A comprehensive business tax review will be completed in the coming year. It will examine how business and corporate taxes can be reformed to enhance the Alberta Advantage. Whether they be small family businesses or globally competing corporations, all forms of enterprise will be included.

We will also conclude the review of provincial fees and charges, and ensure that these fees and charges are reasonable and reflect the cost of the services provided.

In the area of nonrenewable resources, the government will proceed with the orderly restructuring of the electricity industry. Deregulation and the introduction of retail choice in 2001 will create a competitive marketplace for new generation and retail services that will offer options to consumers and ensure that Albertans continue to benefit from a reliable power supply.

Our government will work to ensure Albertans understand their options and rights in this new electricity marketplace, so that they are well-equipped to make informed choices when choices become available. A regulatory framework will be developed that focuses on consumer protection and awareness, and a fair marketplace with a high standard of business conduct.

This year, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act 2000 will be introduced. The Act will expand the current Abandoned Well Program. It will enhance the Energy and Utilities Board's ability to manage site abandonment and reclamation in a responsible manner that ensures safety and protects the environment and the public purse.

The government is committed to ensuring Alberta's international marketing activities are globally competitive, coordinated, and focused on promoting continued economic growth and prosperity. Therefore, the government is developing an international strategy focused on building relationships with foreign governments, removing barriers to trade, and promoting investment, trade and tourism in partnership with the private sector.

A significant opportunity to build global relationships will be Alberta's participation at the 2000 World Exposition in Hanover, Germany.

The Alberta government will use the 2000 World Expo as a high-profile venue from which to launch its longer-term European strategy. Alberta's Expo participation will focus on technology and innovation.

### *The Government Plan – Health and Education*

The people of Alberta work hard and with pride to reap the economic harvests that make Alberta strong. They know, however, that economic prosperity is not an end in itself. Albertans expect that the results of their commitment will be a good education system, quality health care, effective social programs, a clean environment, and safe, strong communities.



The government will take action in each of these areas over the coming year.

Our government will work to make Alberta's education system a leader in Canada. It will introduce a new, \$3-million academic scholarship program that will benefit approximately 3,000 second-year post-secondary students and reward them for their hard work. The government will also increase student financial assistance levels and will continue to improve the student loan application process to make it easier for students, and will work with students to enhance available information to help in planning for a post-secondary education.

Our government will also expand the Child Health Benefit to cover children of low-income post-secondary students.

A key area of emphasis will be on continuing a collaborative, flexible and responsive learning system that encourages Albertans to be life-long learners. The Minister of Learning will work with government's education partners on school and student improvement issues such as literacy and class size. As well, fund-raising in the primary and secondary school system will be reviewed to ensure that students and parents are not fund-raising to meet the basic educational needs of their schools.

The government will work with institutions on enhancing access through technology, and will work with partners to promote second-language programs to help students participate in the global economy.

In the area of health and wellness, a six-point plan will be implemented to keep Alberta's health system sustainable and effective in the face of mounting pressures. Alberta will continue to play a leadership role across Canada in working to strengthen the system, and will renew its pledge to respect the principles of the Canada Health Act and maintain a single-tier, publicly funded health system that is accessible to all Albertans on an equitable basis.

Legislation will be introduced to help protect and preserve the publicly funded health system by putting Alberta's commitment to the principles of the Canada Health Act into provincial law and enabling health authorities to pursue new, innovative ways of delivering publicly funded health services.

The government will implement the overall directions for enhancing continuing care resulting from the Long Term Care Review, and it will also work with

regional boards to follow up on the review of the Persons with Developmental Disabilities program to strengthen support for Albertans with developmental disabilities.

Government will continue to focus on maintaining and improving the health of Albertans through prevention of illness and injury by expanding screening programs for breast and cervical cancer, and by launching a new three-year immunization plan. And, government will increase access to essential services by increasing front-line staff levels in the health system, and by reducing waiting times for surgeries and diagnostic procedures.

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### *The Government Plan – Caring and Strong Communities*

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We know that the harvest of prosperity is not always equally shared by all members of society. Therefore, programs to protect and assist those in need will continue to be a focus in the coming year.

We will continue to support those who need assistance, and help people ready and able to re-enter the workforce. The Human Resources and Employment Minister's Employability Council will look at ways to ensure that all Albertans have the opportunity to contribute to the strength of the province.

To address the pressing problem of homelessness, the government will work with public and private partners to coordinate programs that provide access to affordable housing and shelter for those in need.

For children, the government's emphasis will be on providing early support for children and families to promote healthy development.

The government will respond to, and act appropriately on, recommendations from the Alberta Children's Forum and the Task Force on Children at Risk. The government will also address issues and needs of adolescents through a Youth Secretariat.

An external review of the factors leading to rising child welfare caseloads will be completed. In addition, the mandate of the Office of the Children's Advocate will be reviewed to make sure the voices of vulnerable children and youth are heard. The government will continue to back its groundbreaking legislation to protect children involved in prostitution.

Government continues to focus resources on crime prevention so that communities in Alberta are safe. Continued support for policing, for the active pursuit and prosecution of organized crime, and for local crime prevention initiatives will help reduce the provincial rate of adult and youth crime.

The government will continue to increase the efficiency of Alberta's courts, using mediation and other effective dispute resolution measures. The government will also review Alberta's Police Act, and continue its work to improve access to the justice system for Albertans.

An important part of Alberta's communities are seniors, who today number about 300,000 and who are a vital part of all Alberta communities, contributing energy, wisdom and time to the development of the province. The Alberta government will continue to provide support to seniors who need it.

In the coming year, the government will increase financial support to the Alberta Seniors Benefit program, so that cash benefits for clients reflect rising costs. Additional funding will also be provided for the Special Needs Assistance Program, a highly successful initiative that has helped thousands of seniors deal with financial emergencies.

The government will also complete its study of the impact of the aging population and will consider recommendations that will strengthen programs, services and housing supports for seniors to enable them to live in security and dignity.

Recognizing the importance of heritage in communities, legislation will be introduced to return objects of religious importance to First Nations peoples. This repatriation legislation will ensure that First Nations communities have full ownership and responsibility for these spiritual artifacts.

Effective ties with other orders of government are important to the province and its communities. Over the next year, we will work with municipalities across the province to strengthen our partnership with local governments. The government will work to improve service in its approach to provincial-municipal policies and programs, and eliminate unnecessary overlap.

Our government will also work in partnership with other governments toward common goals. Alberta will continue to seek a strong, productive partnership with Ottawa and the provinces to address issues of national concern effectively. This

partnership is essential to ensure that initiatives from the two levels of government complement each other rather than duplicate, and that programs are responsive and accountable to the needs of Albertans and Canadians.

To improve the way government provides services to Albertans and communities, a wide range of services, products and information will be made available through a one-window approach. This will enable Albertans to get what they need without having to know from which department to get it. It will also allow them to decide how they want to get it, whether over the counter, over the phone, or over the Internet.

The government will continue with its \$900-million, three-year reinvestment in provincial infrastructure systems, ensuring that the province's roads are safe and meeting the needs of Albertans.

### *The Government Plan – A Clean Environment*

Albertans desire a clean, safe natural environment. The government will continue to show leadership in preserving and protecting Alberta's environment and, with it, Albertans' health and quality of life.

The government will build on last year's consultations to address issues such as climate change, sustainable development, protection of endangered species, and parks policy.

Through Climate Change Central, the government will work with industry and communities to continue to develop practical strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. As well, the government will monitor the status of species at risk in the province and develop management strategies to restore populations to sustainable levels.

Alberta's diversity of wildlife and habitat are parts of a natural heritage that citizens want to protect and enjoy for the new century and beyond. The government will continue to strike a balance between preserving Alberta's natural heritage and sustaining its use as a contributor to outdoor recreation, nature appreciation, and development.



## Conclusion

In this first year of the new century, Albertans can expect to be blessed with a harvest as bountiful as that which ushered in Alberta's first year as a province in the twentieth century. The values that characterized Alberta in Lieutenant Governor Bulyea's time still shape this province today, and they will continue to mold the government's agenda in all of its aspects.

As Alberta begins the twenty-first century, the government commits itself to doing all it can to nurture the province's bountiful harvest of prosperity, safety and quality of life. At the same time, the government recognizes that Albertans achieve best when government does not erect barriers to their success; therefore, the government pledges to stay out of people's lives when intervention would only be intrusion.

Alberta's new century begins with a recognition of the importance of the agricultural industry; a new economic plan; a renewed commitment to the Canada Health Act and the quality of health care for all Albertans; a strong and responsive education system; a sound fiscal plan and a commitment to lower taxes; and a variety of initiatives to strengthen communities and those who live in them.

This plan bodes well for Alberta. It is as bold as Albertans themselves. It is rooted in the soil of the province's rich past and will be nourished by the promise of the province's future.

To Mrs. Hirsch, to the Class of 2000, to Baby Micheal, and to all Albertans, the government promises to work with all of you to ensure that in the new century, this province continues to write a history of greatness, and a legacy of hope and promise, for all of its citizens. We trust that our deliberations in this Assembly will continue to be for the common goal of achieving what is good for Alberta, and that the citizens of this province here today will see fit to judge their harvest bountiful.

Now I leave you to the business of this session, confident that as elected representatives you will in every way fulfill your responsibilities to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly, I pray that the blessing of God may rest on your deliberations, just as it did on Alberta's first Assembly in March 1906.

God bless Alberta.  
God bless Canada.  
God save the Queen.